

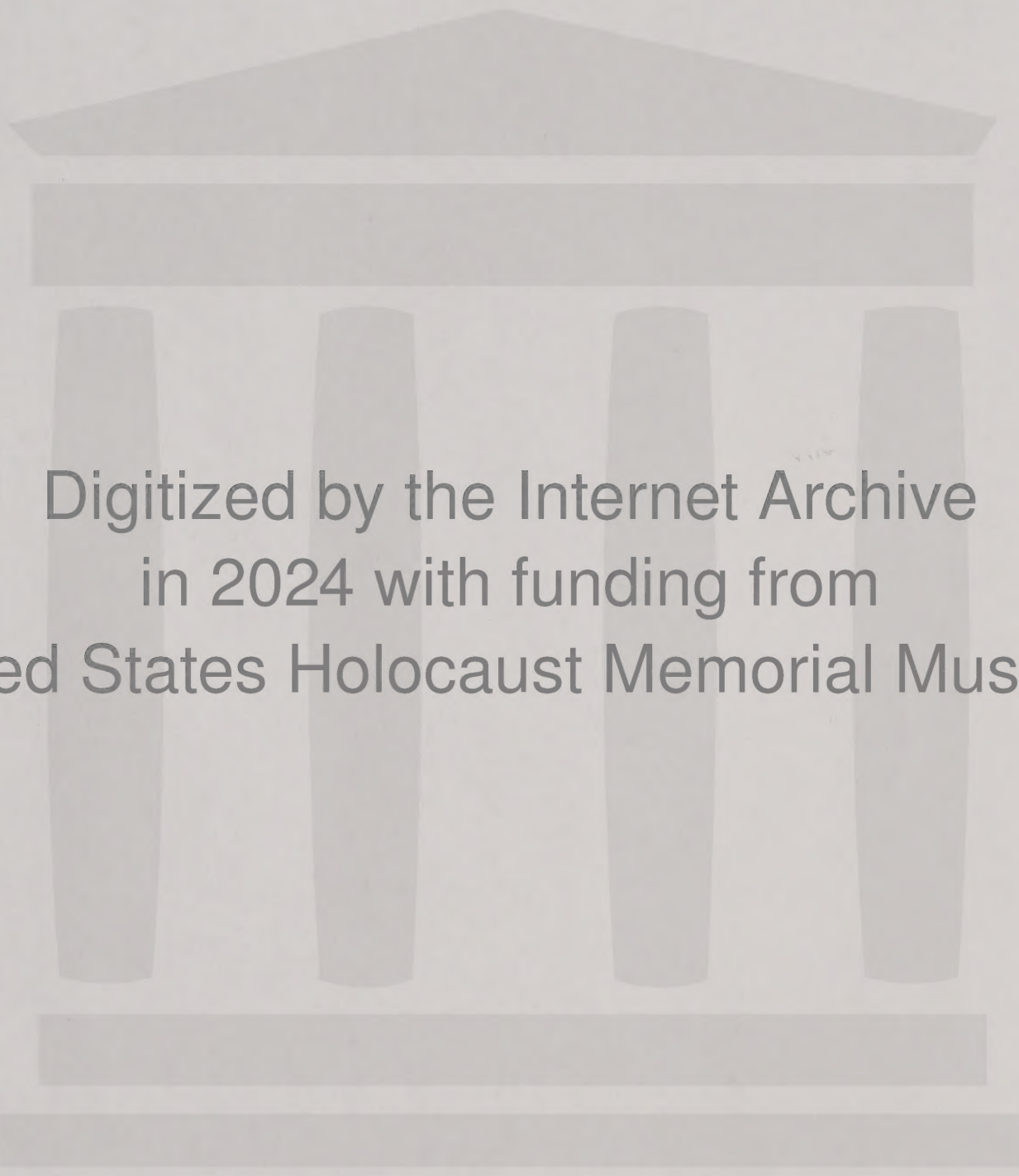


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MEMORIES OF MANYEVITZ

AND OF WARTIME

by Alexander Tinne

Israel, 2000

My father's description of the murder of Nyoma of Kovel brings me back to the period of the mid-'30's when I used to visit Nyoma's smithy from time to time. My cousin, Vova Une of Kolky, worked there for a short while. And here's a story:

Vova Une had graduated the Vilna Technion in 1934, having specialized in mechanics. While he was visiting our uncles Yoel Tinne and Babtchuk, owners of a flour mill in the village of Borowitz on the River Styr, he fell in love with his mother's (my aunt) sister, Pearl Tinne. She became pregnant and they wanted to marry, an act absolutely forbidden by the Jewish religion. They went to Lutsk and, with the help of a relative and because they had different surnames, they were properly married by a rabbi. When the news of this fraud reached the ears of Vova's father, Shimon Une, (an owner of a flour mill in Kolky and an activist in the community) he revealed this travesty to the rabbis who immediately proclaimed the couple's excommunication. Shimon said, "For me, Vova is dead."

As luck would have it, within a period of 6 months, the 2 ritual slaughterers of Kolky died of heart attacks, apparently caused by their fighting over the quotas of slaughtering. But the religious Jews of Kolky declared otherwise, claiming that the death of the two men was due to the great sin of the excommunicated couple's living in their midst and decided to carry out the edict of death by stoning. At the very last moment, the couple managed to escape the throng that was nearing their house and fled to a neighboring village. They had saved their lives but were left without a livelihood. Vova came to Manyevitz, lived with us and found temporary work in Nyoma's smithy.

Nyoma was for me a true Biblical Samson the Mighty: tall, good looking, muscular, with enormous strength. Beside him was Vova, tall, strong and handsome. On one of my visits Nyoma told the story of how he had taken a day off to take an examination to qualify for the Certificate of Master. In the practical exam, he was required to make a rim for a one-meter diameter wheel. He had finished first among

the 10 examinees and had produced the best work. But in the theory section of the test where he was asked to explain his calculation for the proper length of the steel rim, he had failed. His answer had been: "I took one meter and then another meter and added a bit more." Vova smiled, and as I looked at Nyoma with admiration he said to me, "It's good that you are studying." More than once during my life I recalled this touching anecdote.

When the Nazis conquered our area, Vova and his wife Pearl gave over their son to a Catholic orphanage for safekeeping and fled to the forest. Vova was accidentally killed by a fellow partisan and Pearl went to the camp under Max Sobieshak.

The Germans bombed the train which was transporting my army unit westward, and I was forced to enter the forest. It was at night. In the early morning I learned that we were near Refalovka. There I met a strange-looking Jew who told me that my entire family had been killed. He then took me to the Bratt family who told me that my father had gone to Rovno only one day before the murders. In Refalovka I also met Pearl together with the daughters of the Muz family, all dressed in tatters. I took off my new warm vest that I was wearing under my army coat and gave it to Pearl. I also gave her several hundred rubles.

A few hours later, when the railroad tracks were repaired, we continued westward. We stopped for a few minutes in the Manyevitz train station, and there I saw Abraham Bronstein, dressed in army uniform and walking on crutches. We waved to each other.

A few weeks passed and I arrived in Rovno together with my radio operator. I was on my way to the mayor of the city to get some information about my father when by chance I met Gala Schock's mother who told me where my father was staying.

The woman of the house was terrified at the sight of 2 soldiers, one of them an officer, and called another woman who said that they knew nothing of the whereabouts of Pinhas Tinne. "I'm his son," I said. They looked at one another and one said, "I'll go look for him." He arrived after a short time. We hugged one another as people hug in a cemetery after a funeral. Not a word could we speak for a few minutes. I then asked for a glass of vodka. "Don't tell me - I already know everything," I said. A few hours later, I left Rovno.

My radio operator, Bashkere, sat on the steps of the house, waiting for me. On our way back he asked me, "How is it that the Jews, a learned and wise people, have no country of their own?" I could find no clear answer to his naïve question.

During my second visit to Rovno I met Asher Flash. "Blessed be He who revives the dead," he said, and added "Rumor has it that you were killed at the front." The rumor mistakenly referred to me when actually it was Benzia Tinne, Zila's brother, who had been killed.

It was at that time that I also met my aunt Pearl. She told me that her son had been adopted by a Polish couple, both teachers, and was living in Lutzk. The orphanage had given her their address. The adoptive parents knew that the biological mother was alive. One day Pearl arrived and asked to see her son. Without a moment's hesitation the woman called, "Bagus, come here." (The name given to the boy by the parents was Boguslaw.) A child of 7 entered the room, greeted everyone politely and looked with wonder at the strange guest dressed so shabbily. He looked from his mother to Pearl and back.

"Bagus, this lady is your mother, and she has come to take you with her." The boy paled and ran crying and shrieking into the next room. Pearl decided that she had best leave him for a while and come visit at a later time so that he might get used to her. She also understood only too well that she could not provide for him as did his adoptive parents. After some time she visited again, and they even went out for a walk together, but he soon fled.

The next time she returned, she found that the family had moved to Poland. Pearl decided to go there to look for her son, no simple matter at that time. Indeed, she went to Poland and worked for years in a factory, all the while looking for a family by the name of Stoliarsky who had a son named Boguslaw.

One of the Polish families that Pearl met at her workplace had a daughter who was studying at a conservatory in Lodz. Once, when the daughter was vacationing at home, she told Pearl that there was a fellow student at the conservatory by the name of Poliarsky. Pearl asked for more details, and wonder of wonders that student was her son!

She went to his room in Lodz where he was living with a devout Catholic girl. (Pearl saw the cross hanging over her bed.) "May I ask to see your identification papers?" were the first words that Boguslaw said to his mother. After checking the

papers, he invited her to sit down. "I know that you are my biological mother, but I have a different mother who raised me, and it is because of her that I am what I am today."

She had previously been given my address by Max Sobieshak (a well-known partisan leader) on one of her visits to him, and had written to me asking if I was her relative. In her second letter she related the story of her son and asked me to write to him. I did so and advised that he and his wife join Pearl and come to Israel. I would handle all the technical arrangements. He answered that he was aware that Pearl was his biological mother and had suspected that he was Jewish even before he met her because he had heard his adoptive parents whispering about it from time to time and joking about his Jewish looks in the grocery store near their home. However, he could not leave his parents who had done so much for him. With all that, he did promise to keep in touch with Pearl.

Pearl came to Israel alone. My father helped her get settled in Safed, arranging rooms and work, but she could not acclimatize to the country and emigrated to Canada. A few years ago she died in Toronto.

As far as I know, her son plays in the Lodz Philharmonic Orchestra and had visited Pearl in Canada before her death.

In this memoir I previously mentioned my meeting Asher Flash in Rovno. I told him at that time that when I was in the Urals in the area of Tchkalov (Orenburg), I had received a letter from his son David who was, if I'm not mistaken, in Tashkent. That was in the autumn of 1941. When Asher Flash heard this, he hugged me close, weeping, "Is he alive?"

David had been given my address by 2 brothers and their cousin, refugees from Lodz who had been in Manyevitz and whom I had met while traveling from Sarny to Olevsk. Together with them were 2 other brothers, refugees from Lublin who had been in Manyevitz, David Mutchnik, Zilberstein and a few more from Sarny. We walked together, headed for the previous border between the U.S.S.R. and Poland. After we crossed the border, we kept walking on the side of the sand road, next to the forest. Every so often the Germans strafed people riding in wagons and those who were walking in the direction of Olevsk.

It was a warm and dry summer day. From time to time, we entered the forest to look for puddles of rainwater to quench our thirst. The forest was a resting place

for Soviet cavalymen, and after a few hours of our walking we heard them riding slowly along the sandy road going in our direction. Two officers rode at the head, followed by two others. One of the officers, armed with an automatic rifle, allowed the others to go ahead some distance, turned his horse around and rode towards us. "Are any of you Russians?" he asked. We answered in the negative. "Ukrainians? Poles?" "Also not," we answered. "In that case you are obviously Jews. Why didn't you remain behind to defend your country, even with sticks? We know you, all you want is white rolls smothered with butter and a party membership card to hide behind. About defending the Motherland you only know how to talk! Good that Hitler is killing you off. It's the right thing to do!" And with that he turned his horse around and galloped away to catch up with the others. The fact that he didn't shoot us was a miracle.

We were shocked by the officer's words and went into the forest to decide what to do. Two or three men said, "Don't you see where we're headed? If we're destined to die, it would be better to die along with our families." And they turned on their heels and left. The refugees from Lublin and I decided to continue, rationalizing that the officer did not represent the government, and that there was no hope in the place from which we had come. Mutchnik and the brothers from Lodz joined us.

In the train station of Olevsk there was great turmoil. Thousands of people, adults and children, loaded down with bundles, were racing from train to train, from car to car. Throughout the entire time the bombings continued, and many people were hit. We decided to keep our distance from the station. Only after a few hours did we succeed in squeezing into a car of a freight train that was traveling eastward, and thus we reached Kiev. In Kiev all the freight cars were emptied. The same frantic scene we had witnessed in Olevsk was taking place here. We succeeded in pushing our way onto another freight car and headed east, at least out of the range of the bombings.

In Stalino (in the region of Danbass) we were put off the train, and we sat down near the station to decide what we should do further. While we were talking, we noticed that a man dressed in civilian clothes kept walking around near us as though he wanted to hear what we were saying. I turned to him and asked if he knew of a place where we could wash up and eat. He immediately led us to a large bathhouse, wonderfully clean, with all the amenities: soap, towels and beds. He then led us to a restaurant in the same building, ordered food for us and sat with us at the table. While

we were eating he asked us all sorts of questions, particularly those regarding the situation of the residents of our town after the Soviets had taken over as compared to their previous situation under the Polish government. After the meal we asked about the possibility of our remaining in the city, but he advised us to continue eastward. He helped us board a freight train whose passengers were mainly Russian and Ukrainian families leaving for the northeastern parts of Soviet Russia. The other trains were packed with refugees, mostly Jews, who were headed for Tashkent. We parted company with the nameless man (he seemed to us to be Jewish) who without a doubt belonged to the NKVD.

We reached the region of Tchkalov. There, in a small railroad station in the middle of the night, the passengers were ordered to disembark. People were sorted out and directed to different places: to a kolkhoz, to a sobkhoz, to factories or to mining towns. We were advised to go to a mining town. At the break of day we were put onto a tarantas, a horse-drawn wagon without springs, equipped with only a board for sitting and were taken through mountainous country with sparse foliage to the town of Eidirla.

We were each assigned living quarters and a place to work. The 2 brothers from Lublin were tailors and were employed in a tailor shop, Mutchnik worked in a carpentry shop, the brothers from Lodz were assigned work in a garage, and I was assigned to work in the technical department of a government company called "Tchkalov Zoloto" which owned several gold mines in the area. (This company's existence had been concealed from the Americans at the outbreak of the revolution.) I was housed with a family of starateil, independents who sold the gold they mined to the government in exchange for money and bonuses and were entitled to purchase unlimited amount of goods, both local and imported, in the "gold store."

During the first month, life went along relatively smoothly. We were allowed to buy as much food and other goods as we pleased. But autumn came, bringing the cold. Mutchnik contracted tuberculosis and died after a short time. The brothers from Lodz were afraid to face the rigors of winter in this area and left for Tashkent in the south. As for me - my life went on in the Red Army.

